

NOLS Receives Historic \$3.1 Million Gift to Expand Access to Wilderness Education

Endowed scholarship to expand financial aid for semester courses

LANDER, Wyo. — June 17, 2025 — The [National Outdoor Leadership School \(NOLS\)](#) is thrilled to announce a transformational \$3.1 million gift from longtime supporter and friend, [JK Nicholas](#). This extraordinary act of philanthropy marks the largest single gift in the school's 60-year history and will have a lasting impact on NOLS' ability to serve students from all backgrounds.

The heart of this investment — an endowed scholarship of \$2.5 million, with \$600,000 allocated to the NOLS Fund over the next five years — will significantly expand financial aid for students enrolling in [semester wilderness expeditions](#). This gift helps restore NOLS' capacity to pre-pandemic levels, ensuring that more young people can experience leadership development in wild, remote places, regardless of their financial means.

"This gift is more than generous. It's visionary," said NOLS President Sandy Colhoun. "In a world that too often feels divided, our wilderness classrooms are among the few remaining spaces where people come together, unplug, and learn how to lead with humility and purpose. JK's belief in that mission and the power of financial aid to remove barriers will shape generations of NOLS students to come."

JK Nicholas has long championed bold ideas in conservation, leadership, and social entrepreneurship. A NOLS alumnus, trustee, and seasoned explorer, JK brings a deep reverence for wild places and a steady commitment to service. He believes that the wilderness can uniquely forge character, awaken curiosity, and train leaders equipped for complexity and change.

"To me, wild places matter because they teach us who we are—and who we can become," stated Nicholas. "The more people we can get out there, the better chance we have at building a more resilient, compassionate world."

Dr. N. Stuart Harris, Chairman of the NOLS Board of Trustees, reflected on the profound legacy of the Nicholas family, "This gift is a milestone—not just in dollars, but in values. JK Nicholas has long stood for the belief that access to wilderness should not be a privilege, but a shared opportunity. His leadership, along with that of his family, has helped shape a stronger, more inclusive NOLS. This endowment will echo through generations of students and leaders who otherwise wouldn't have had this chance."

In a time marked by division, uncertainty, and rapid change, the need for principled leadership has never been greater. Wilderness expeditions offer a rare opportunity to step away from distractions, to struggle and succeed together, and to practice finding common ground. At NOLS, students learn to communicate with clarity, act with integrity, and live by the values of teamwork and resilience. These aren't just outdoor skills—they're life skills. And in today's world, they are essential.

To find out more about how the impact of giving to NOLS continues to elevate the leaders of tomorrow, please visit <https://www.nols.edu/en/giving/impact/>

NOLS FUND + WAYS TO GIVE | [LINK](#)

Contributions can be made [online](#) or by mail: NOLS, 284 Lincoln Street, Lander, WY 82520

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About NOLS

Founded in 1965 in a small cabin in Sinks Canyon, Wyoming, by Paul Petzoldt, the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) is a nonprofit global wilderness school that seeks to help individuals step forward boldly as leaders. We believe that anyone can be a leader; it's our role to provide the environment and training to help them discover their full potential. We do that in classrooms close to home and remote wilderness areas worldwide. The scope of NOLS' mission and impact is broad, with 14 campuses across six countries and educational opportunities worldwide. The school enrolls over 28,000 students and employs more than 1,000 full-time and part-time staff and instructors, with an annual budget of approximately \$40 million in a typical year. NOLS currently has more than 366,000 active alumni. For more information, visit nols.edu | [@nolsedu](#) | 800.710.6657

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